



Eyewitness Recounts Passenger Shooting

Mary Gardner Saw Rigoberto Alpizar Running

Dec. 8, 2005 — - Mary Gardner was aboard Wednesday's American Airlines Flight 924 to Orlando, Fla., the same flight from which Rigoberto Alpizar bolted. Gardner, who was sitting toward the front of the plane, saw Alpizar run through the Boeing 757 and then heard the gunshots.

"There was some sort of energy that was happening because I was sitting next to a former pilot and he identified one of the air marshals that was sitting right in front of us that had jumped up," Gardner said.

"You felt the energy, people were watching, and then all of a sudden you did see a guy run through the aisle really quick and her [his wife] running after. Then we heard shots, heard yelling, everybody screaming 'hit the deck' and then everybody sat there -- I mean it got really scary after that."

Alpizar had been saying that he had a bomb in his backpack. When air marshals were chasing him off the plane, he reached for his bag, so they shot and killed him in the jetway at Miami International Airport. No bomb was found.

Gardner said she didn't think Alpizar was yelling when he ran through the plane.

"The wife was frantic and ... I thought he was probably so terrified to get on the plane," she said. "That's what I thought."

Alpizar and his wife, Anne Buechner, had arrived earlier in the day from Quito, Ecuador, and were taking a flight to Orlando because they lived nearby in Maitland. They had been in Peru on vacation with their church.

"She was tearful, she was crying 'my husband, my husband,'" Gardner added. "When he ran up there, I know there was a scuttlebutt, some kind of intensity happening in the front and those poor people in first class saw everything. There were children, and I know that was horrifying for them."

Then the couple left the plane -- and Alpizar was shot. When his wife returned, she was "absolutely hysterical," Gardner said.

"She was laying there and there were police officers around her and she started screaming -- well, she had been on the floor trying to get to her husband and they wouldn't let her go over there," Gardner said.

"Everybody had hit the deck and she was crying 'my husband, my husband' and she was yelling all these things and afterwards she had run back into the gate and she was right between first and second class, there were people holding her and then at that point she started breaking down," she added.

Then the woman revealed her husband was bipolar.

"She said: 'My husband. He's bipolar. He didn't take his medicine,'" Gardner said.

Gardner said that "everybody was still crouched down" and that she couldn't see beyond that.

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